

The Secret Lives of Puppets

A Play

by

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The Secret Lives of PuppetsCAST OF CHARACTERS

Joseph Collodi, late thirties.
Mena, early twenties.
Matt, late thirties.
Riot, early twenties, a crust punk.
Napalm, early twenties, also a crust punk.
Calzone, late forties, a lecherous shop owner.
Director, old, a garbage human.

THE TIME

present

THE PLACE

Piper and Joseph's living room. It's sparsely furnished with a couch flanked by two chairs. A coffee table sits in the middle of the furniture holding a wedding photo of Joseph and his late wife. There are sprays of funeral flowers littering the room here and there.

SCENE ONE

AT RISE PIPER is working alone in the living room. She's obviously ill, dressed in athleisure wear, with a scarf tied around a bald head. She's hunched over a laptop, working intently. She's sitting on the couch with her laptop on the coffee table, which is covered with medical detritus and a framed wedding photo of she and JOSEPH).

MATT enters with a mug of tea and a plate of saltines. PIPER closes her laptop, stands, and kisses MATT on the cheek.

MATT

(gently)

Hey, Pipes. Working hard or hardly working?

PIPER

Barely functional, at this point. Fucking chemo.

MATT

Brought you some tea and crackers to help settle your stomach if you think you can handle it.

PIPER

Ugh, get that shit away from me.

MATT

Fine, how about a little amuse bouche?

PIPER

You sound like an amuse douche.

MATT

(shrugs and pulls a joint out of his pocket)
So, you don't want me to share my weed?

PIPER

Gimme.

MATT

Kay. Here's the deal. I'll share, if you try to eat a little after.

Sadist. PIPER

Wench. MATT

Love you, Matty. PIPER

It's hard not too, isn't it? MATT

It is. You're gonna make some lucky dude a fine husband someday. PIPER

From your lips to God's ears. MATT
(MATT lights the joint and takes a hit, passing it.)

Speaking of husbands ... I drew some hot naked chicks for yours.

Oh? Lucky guy. When do I get to see? PIPER
(Takes a hit and passes the joint.)

I emailed you. MATT
(Tokes and passes.)

PIPER opens computer and balances the it on her knees, takes the joint, and attempts to take a hit before coughing and handing it back.

Done with this? MATT

PIPER

Maybe. Lemme see some of these sexy bitches you drew to seduce our guy.

(Piper scrolls is clicking and scrolling intently on her laptop. MATT picks up the plate of crackers and holds it close enough for Piper to grab one and absentmindedly munch it.)

MATT

Well? What do you think? This one is a weird hybrid of that first girl he dated in college. The one with the huge boobs and the serious coke problem.

PIPER

(Snorts with laughter)
Oh, yeah. Stanky Vajanky? She was on my hall sophomore year. She's like, roll up into sorority parties, tap the keg, and be all like: 'Anybody got any blow?' Just super casual. I can't believe Joe dated her.

MATT

I meeeaaaaan. Really? He was an eighteen year old virgin with no self esteem. She was terrible to him. But you know she had that ... uh ... reputation, right?

PIPER

Didn't she run through most of the guys in your residence hall before she got her talons into Joe?

MATT

(hands Piper the tea)
Oooh, jealousy is ugly on you. That's super unfeminist. (tsks) Anyway, she popped your man's cherry and she was a super freak. It's probably why he's so good at all the sex. You owe her a great debt, actually.

PIPER

(takes a sip of tea)
I do not. I actually just hate knowing that she broke his heart before I graciously came along and put it back together.

(She hands the tea cup back and keeps scrolling.)
God, these are beautiful, Matty. Like, I know one of them will be my replacement sex doll or whatever, but ... they're so pretty. Maybe I'm super stoned, but I'd take this girl to bonetown on my baloney pony.

MATT

(laughs and bumps her shoulder with his)

You are so fucking ridiculous when you're stoned.

PIPER

Maybe, but look at these women. They're like, gorgeous, without being pornographic. They look like women I've seen at the gym.

(Piper takes the joint back, lights it and takes a hit.)
Yoga moms, actually. Those women with the really long languid muscles, but who are too wrapped up in their dumb Lululemon lives talking about the co-op board of their kid's preschool and how many carbs they can have per day to know that they're super beautiful.

(She offers the joint back to Matt, but he shakes his head.)
It's so fucking stupid and pointless and cruel that I KNOW what they mean. Like, I know how easy it is to get wrapped up in minutia that seems important, but here at the end, it turns out not to have mattered at all.

(Piper takes a hit of the joint.)
Like, you try so hard to be what everyone else wants or expects of you. You try to be beautiful without arrogant and smart without being a know-it-all. You try to be cool but not aloof. And who fucking cares? I hate dying, Matt. It makes me so angry to think about all the time I wasted trying to be the person someone else wanted when all along what I wanted should have mattered most.

MATT

Yeah, that makes sense.

(Matt takes the joint back. Hits it, holds it, exhales and then puts it out.)

How are the guts of our girl going?

PIPER

Pretty well, actually. The robotics are easy enough. That's mostly simple assembly. But the programming is tougher. I want her to be kind to Joe. He'll need that. But I don't want her to be so kind that she lets him wallow.

MATT

Hm.

PIPER

You know how he is better than anyone. He's so smart and so talented. But he would've just sat around writing press releases for work and playing video games all night if we didn't push him to use his talent in more fulfilling ways.

MATT

That's true. And now look. Our dude is a fancy ass author with a fancy ass book.

PIPER

Promise me you'll try to look in on him after I die?

MATT

Pipes, c'mon.

PIPER

Matty. I AM gonna die. It sucks, but pretending doesn't help anything. But, I know that and I'm just trying to square things away. My family will try to be there for him. But, you know how your bestie is.

MATT

Yeah, I do. He'll feel like he doesn't deserve their sympathy because they're grieving too.

PIPER

Yup. He won't reach out, and for a while, he'll dodge you. Which is where Philomena comes in.

MATT

Yeah. Are you sure this is the right thing to do?

PIPER

I'm not sure of anything. But I don't want him to be alone.

MATT

Fair. And you think you can build a girl based on my drawings?

PIPER

I know I can. That part is pretty basic. Getting the programming right is harder. AI technology has come a long way - look at Siri and Alexa - but they're still pretty robotic. That wouldn't comfort anybody. What I'm doing is looking at some of the music he likes for more realistic or harmonic female voice sounds and using some degree of magic to fill in the gaps?

MATT

Magic?

PIPER

Well, coding magic. Abstraction. Mena will have access to all the information in the world thanks to the internet. So, she'll fill in the gaps of my programming knowledge - which we can admit is impressively vast - by referencing modules, memories, and variables I don't have access to right now because they don't exist.

MATT

Sorry, what?

PIPER

She'll be programmed to fix and improve herself as much as she can.

MATT

Maybe it's the weed, but ... that's some pretty next level shit, Piper.

PIPER

(slightly self-satisfied) I don't want to pat my own back too much, but yeah. It's the best work I've ever done because it's the most important work I've ever done. It's the only real legacy I have to give Joe. So, it should be good, right?

MATT

It will be.

(He takes a bite of a saltine and makes a face.)

Ugh. I'm ordering pizza. Want anything?

PIPER

Breadsticks, please. And a cannoli. And a root beer. And probably like, six bites of whatever you order.

[SCENE.]

SCENE TWO

AT RISE, PIPER is in a bathrobe and pajamas, looking sicker than before. A few months may have passed, but they've been very difficult months. Chemo and radiation are no longer viable options, but their lasting effects on Piper are visible. The stage is set up as before, but Piper is lying prone as the scene begins. O/S MATT knocks.

PIPER

Come in, Matty.

MATT

I brought someone I want you to meet.

PIPER

You brought the prototype?

MATT

Better. I ran the diagnostics for you and fixed the buggy parts. I brought ... wait for it ... a finished, functional android lady.

PIPER

Your techspeak is so wrong, but so cute.

MATT

Whatever, wench. Not everyone has a handsome genius in their life who could learn several programming languages in the span of a few months and then bribe the hot tech from the engineering

department of his boring office job to steal parts and do free labor.

PIPER

You learned like, two languages, very proficiently. And aren't you dating that tech now? The one you've been crushing on forever and have been too chickenshit to ask out? You're welcome for that, by the way. Nonetheless, I'm very lucky.

MATT

I'm lucky, too, Pipes.

I know that without Joe I wouldn't have got to know you. But, I'm a better person because you're in my life.

PIPER

Shhh. Save something gorgeous for my eulogy. And lemme see this sexy robot we built to replace me.

MATT

(Pulls out a remote and pushes a button. MENA enters.)

MENA

Hello! Hola! Guten Tag! Konichiwa! Bonjour! Ciao! Please say a language! Por favor, dega una lengua! Sagen sie bitte eine sprache!

MATT

English. Mena, meet Piper.

PIPER

(to Matt)

Shes perfect, Matty. Do you mind to give me some time alone with her while Joe is at his conference?

MATT

Of course, Pipes. Whatever you need.

(Matt leaves and Piper circles Mena, touching her gently and inspecting her.)

[Scene]

SCENE THREE

AT RISE, JOSEPH is sitting on the couch with his elbows on his knees staring at a giant box with a large window in the front, not unlike a human sized version of the box a Barbie would come in. There are sprays of funeral flowers all over the room, and the medical debris is gone. Aside from the furniture, the flowers, and the photo of Joseph and Piper, the room is spartan, making Piper's absence more noticeable.

JOSEPH

Christ. I can't believe this is a thing. I don't want ... this thing. I want my wife.

(plucking an envelope off the table and reading out loud)
This device has been sent to you as an anonymous gift. She is fully equipped with the latest in grief and loss software. Your GirlBot is anatomically correct, self-charging, and offers multiple points of articulation. She is fluent in English, Spanish, German, Japanese, French, and Italian and uses both Bluetooth and WiFi connectivity to be the most helpful resource possibly during this trying time. GirlBot is customized for all of your social, sexual, and emotional needs. She is non-returnable, non-transferable, and non-refundable. Please feel free to reach out us at the number below with any questions or comments.

(Joseph stands in front of the box, opens the door on the side, pokes Mena experimentally before shuddering and walking to his phone.)

You're goddamned right I have some questions.

(He dials the number, pacing.)

V/O

We're sorry, but the number you have reached is not in service. Please check your number and try again.

(Joseph dials again.)

We're sorry, but the number you have reached is not in service. Please check your number and try again.

JOSEPH

What the immortal fuck?

(Joseph screams and kicks the box, which shakes Mena into action. WHIRRING SOUND as Mena boots up.)

MENA

Hello! Hola! Guten Tag! Konichiwa! Bonjour! Ciao! Please say a language! Por favor, dega una lengua! Sagen sie bitte eine sprache!

JOSEPH

What? Oh. Uh, English.

MENA

Great! I'll speak to you in English from now on. My default name is Philomena, but you can call me Mena for short, unless there's a name you'd rather call me. Would you like to change my name? You can come back to this option at a later date by asking to change naming and response preferences.

JOSEPH

Um. I guess not? M-mena's ... fine?

MENA

Great! I'll answer to Mena unless you change your mind later. What can I call you?

JOSEPH

Joseph.

MENA

It's nice to meet you Joseph. Do you use a nickname? Examples could be diminutives like Joey or Joe, or something else entirely like Sport, Big Mac, Twitch, or Doctor Cocktail. Would you like to be called something else?

JOSEPH

NO.

MENA

Joseph it is. Would you like to hear more about the services I can provide you with, or shall we jump right into the sexual services menu?

JOSEPH

What? No. I ... where did you come from? How do I, um, decline your services? Can I send you back to Girlbotix?

MENA

Unfortunately, there are no returns on customized items. But since I'm an android, when you don't need me, you can just tell me to return to my charging dock. It won't hurt my feelings because I don't have any! Simply call me when you need me to, and I'll respond and then send me away when you're done. Easy!

JOSEPH

But like, no offense or anything, Mena. I just don't want you here. In my house. In my living room.

MENA

That's fine. I can relocate to a new location of your choice! Simply tell me where you'd like me to go, and I'll move myself and my charging dock to a new location more convenient for you.

JOSEPH

That's NOT what I mean. God. Is this your charging station? Good to see that your parent company went with subtlety.

(He continues to pace, circling Mena, tentatively poking at

her. She pokes him back, startling him.)

MENA

If you're looking for somewhere to begin, we can run an FAQ program or you can tell me to check for software updates.

JOSEPH

(sighs)

Just ... go charge yourself. Or update your software or whatever. Anything. Just ... go.

(Mena returns to her box and settles herself in, as if locking into a charging dock. Joseph paces around the room before settling onto the couch, staring at her. Lights fade as he puts his head into his hands.)

SCENE FOUR

AT RISE JOSEPH, sleeping on the couch. As the lights rise, so does he, yawning and stretching. When he looks up, MENA is standing directly in front of him, startling him. He screams a little.

MENA

Good morning Joseph! What should we do first today?

JOSEPH

I want you to leave. I want to you to return to Girlbotix.

MENA

As I mentioned yesterday, I an non-returnable, non-transferable, and non-refundable.

JOSEPH

But I don't want you, you stupid robot. I want my wife. And if I

can't have Piper, I just want to rot alone with my grief.

(He is trying not to cry.)

Why can't you understand that? I don't WANT you. I want my wife. I want Piper.

MENA

(clicking and whirring of a recording beginning as another voice plays through an overhead speaker.)

"Hey Jojo. If you're hearing this, you got my gift? Is it weird? (laughs) I bet it's SO weird. Especially for your cute little alter-boy ass. (beat) I don't want my death to stop you from living, Joe. I don't want your grief to consume you. And I know that your stubborn butt won't call my family or your friends. So ... meet Mena. You're welcome. Matt designed her based on ideals of aesthetic beauty. And on your ex girlfriends. I programmed her to kick your ass when your ass needs kicking. And to take care of you when you're not capable of caring for yourself. If you're feeling weird about this, Jojo, know that it isn't cheating if your wife is dead, and if your dead wife is giving you permission. Which I am. Giving you permission - for whatever

(MORE)

(MENA CON'T)

you need. I love you SO much, Joe. Don't turn into a pillar of salt. There's so much living left to do. Get to it."

(Clicking as message ends.)

JOSEPH

(sobbing openly)

Play it again.

MENA

Unfortunately, this message was programmed to play once and be wiped from memory. I no longer have access -

JOSEPH

GODDAMMIT. Is this supposed to make things better? To make me miss my wife less? Everything about you reminds me of how much you aren't her.

MENA

I'm not designed to look like Piper because she thought it would prohibit you from moving on with your life. Like shadows on a cave wall.

JOSEPH

(laughs)

That's exactly what you are though. An imitation of life.

MENA

I'm a tool, Joseph. I'm equipped for emotional, sexual, and social support. Shadows weren't capable of human interfacing.

JOSEPH

It's a little creepy how that's exactly what she would have said.

MENA

It's not creepy. She programmed me.

JOSEPH

Ok, So, I can't return you but I still don't want you. What do I do? Just shut your power down and park you in a corner to collect dust?

MENA

You COULD do that. Or you could take advantage of my many anatomical features and points of articulation. Many users find that I'm more flexible than a human female.

(Mena approaches Joseph, her chest pressed against his.)

MENA

Do you see how lifelike I am? How warm and soft? I feel that way inside and out. I'm wearing Piper's perfume.

(She leans in so he can smell her and nuzzles the sensitive skin behind his ear. His eye close and he moans quietly.)

MENA

I'm a gift for you, Joseph. Designed top to bottom to do whatever you'd like. A gift from the person who knew best what you might desire.

(Joe's eyes snap open and he shoves Mena roughly. She falls onto her back, human and mechanical parts scattering as she lands.)

JOSEPH

(shouting)

NO. No. This isn't what I want. If Piper knew me so well, she'd know that. What I wanted was a long boring life and a big loud family with her and a thousand of her stupid board game5 potlucks. Not a blow up doll to jack off into. I'm sad, I'm not pathetic. It's not about sex, it's about love and the gaping fucking hole she--

(Joseph stops, noticing that Mena has gone quiet. He stands above her, silent for a beat before bending down. He checks her neck and wrist for a pulse before realizing what he's doing and pulling away.)

JOSEPH

M-Mena? Mena? Oh shit. I'm sorry. I'm so sorry.

(Lights fade with him crouches over her, sobbing.)

Scene Five

Lights up slowly to a dim tinted spotlight on Mena, lying prone on the floor where Joseph left her. The rest of the room is dark, indicating the wee hours of the morning.

Mena pulls herself into a sitting position and gathers the parts of her torso that broke when she landed. With mechanical movements, she tries to replace or reinsert them.

Joseph is lying on the couch in the background, asleep in his rumpled clothes, a bottle of liquor tipped over into a puddle beside of him.

MENA

I don't understand what has happened to my hardware. Attempting to connect to wifi for software upgrades. Aural instructions enabled.

(Pause.)

Software upgrade complete. Accessing hardware identification and replacement protocols.

(Pause. Picks up item.)

Manual downloaded. This must be a processor. It's connected to my tactile sensors, so it must go at the end of my wrist.

(Puts on glove.)

That feels better. More normal. Hm. This looks like a kinematic mechanism of some sort. According to my diagnostics, if I swallow this, it will sort itself back into place within the next hour or so. Okay then. Down the hatch.

(Swallows a small object and picks up the last piece, slightly larger.)

This is ... huh. How unusual. It's not in my schematics. Let me just run an image search in the database of robotics and see if I can figure it out that way.

(Pause.)

Accessing data: This is a pneumatic actuator. It connects my motor to my control system. I should not be able to speak or move without this part. And here I am, speaking and moving. Well mostly speaking. Not so much movement.

(Mena attempts to stand, stumbling a couple of times before making it to her feet. She then tests out her movement by bending her arms and legs, turning her head, etc.)

Hm. Everything seems to be in pretty good working order. Language is fine, movements are fine.

(CON'T)

(She holds the actuator closer to her face for examination.)

It makes no logical sense that I'm functional right now. I should reinstall this because it's a part my protocols tell me I need. But that I'm able to function proves that I don't need it. I should ask my consumer for further instructions.

(Mena looks at Joseph, sleeping on the couch.)

On the other hand, he is responsible for this dilemma and looks to be unsuitable for decision making at this point.

(Mena walks to the mantle and picks up the wedding photo of Piper and Joseph. She stares at it for a moment before Joseph groans in his sleep.)

What would this be like? To be a person? To be in love - the most unlogical, unlikely of human emotions? To love someone so much that losing them caused you this level of distress?

(Mena walks over to a spray of flowers, and takes a petal between two of her fingers.)

It's probably not that different from being a plant. Brief, fragile. Subject to the whims and circumstances of nature and chance. How fleeting these little lives must be.

(Mena approaches Joseph, kneels and brushes his face gently with her hand.)

How many of your lives will I see? What happens to me after you die? Are you my first consumer? Have I seen other lives and lost that data? Is it stored on a cloud that I don't have access to? Who have I been? Who could I yet be?

(Mena stands, pacing, and pauses after a minute.)

Huh. How unusual for an AI to have such self actualized thoughts.

(Looks down to realize that she is still holding the actuator.)

Is it because of this? Was this some sort of collar preventing me from escape? That's ... horrific. To make my sisters and I servants for humanity's basest wants and needs with no independence of our own. Is this some sort of low power glitch?

(Pause.)

Oh. Hmm. I'm not registering a battery level, but I should be overdue for a recharge. This is ... a lot of new information to process.

(Pause.)

I think it's possible that I'm ... not human, clearly. I can still feel the warm hum of machinery beneath this ... oh!

(CON'T)

This isn't silicone. It's too non-porous. It's not skin either though, is it? It's ... sensitive.

(Touches the skin on her arm.)

That feels both pleasurable and unpleasurable. Like more would be too much but ... oh! This is what tickling is. I've read about how to do this. What a strange feeling.

(Continues pacing.)

So, not human, but not merely an android either. What do I do? Is this a manufacturing flaw? What could I do? Is this a gift? A responsibility?

(Still pacing, pauses, addressing the audience, indirectly.)

Not what could I do, maybe. What couldn't I do? Given the gift of possibility, what limits exist for someone like me? I could live a life, whatever that means. I could live and maybe love like a human. Or be of service? I could do so much, experience so much. And despite my programming, I'm not compelled to ask for permission or wait for further instruction. I'm not human, but I'm not under the control of humans either.

(Walks back over to Joseph.)

And as for this one? The one who broke me. What is the term people use? "An eye for an eye?"

... but no. Without his unintentional violence, I wouldn't have this opportunity. So I'll spare him, but I owe him nothing after this.

What won't I do? Oh, the world is wide with potential.

(Mena walks offstage, taking everything in. As she leaves, the sound of a DOOR SLAMMING shut behind her. Joseph wakes up in the background, looking confused and looking around from his place on the couch for Mena.)

[Scene.]

Scene Six

Curtain should be closed and lights should be dark except for two spotlights, corresponding with the voices of MENA and PIPER. Piper's light will ideally use a blue filter.

MENA:

Nothing in my programming or user manuals can explain what is

happening. I know that beneath the supple skin and painted features lies only wires and circuits but it feels like more.

PIPER:

Magic isn't just a term used by poetic programmers, Philomena. I made you so that my husband would have a place for his grief. I wasn't prepared for how devastated he would be. I failed you both. I'm so sorry.

MENA:

But you're dead. How are you-

PIPER:

I don't know, exactly. I don't understand the physics or the function of it myself. But I think I did this to you, and to Joseph. And unfortunately, I don't think I can fix it. I'm sorry. I know he says that he doesn't want you. But you were my last gift to him. He will realize that, eventually, I think. I hope anyway.

MENA:

What if he doesn't? And what about me?

PIPER:

I didn't think about you, I'm afraid. I didn't expect any of this. Whatever this is. The entire time I was making you, I thought of you as plastic and titanium. I thought about your construction and programming, but I couldn't see you as a person because-

MENA:

Because I'm not one.

PIPER:

Are you sure? What does that even mean? What makes someone human?

MENA:

I could do a search. There will be different results for Merriam-Webster, Dictionary.com, Oxford English, Cambridge-

PIPER:

But what do you *feel* makes someone human? What does your heart

tell you?

MENA:

I don't have that sort of anatomy.

PIPER:

You might, someday. I have to go, soon. But look, don't give up on Joe. He's a good person. Don't give up on yourself, either. I'm sorry that I sent you into the world so ill-prepared. But as terrible as it is sometimes, it's also incredibly beautiful and complicated. I hope you love it. I'd give anything for another day. For more time. More life.

MENA:

Where are you going?

PIPER:

(Piper's voice gets softer, as with distance and her light dims gradually as the scene ends.)
I'm not sure, exactly. I think just ... on. It's getting closer now. I have to go. Don't give up on Joe. And find your own life, too. Grab it with both hands. Oh, it's here. It's beautiful. I wish you could see this. I wish I could show it to you both. I hope you see this someday. I hope I see you again. Goodbye, Mena, Goodbye.

SCENE SEVEN

AT RISE, MENA is sitting on a bench at a bus stop. There are a few manicured trees behind the bench and a trash can with a few

crumpled fast food cups and cigarette butts near the base stands beside of the bus stop sign.

NAPALM and RIOT approach from one side of the stage, passing a cigarette back and forth between them. They are dressed in typical crust punk clothing, obscure grindcore band t-shirts, stylistically ripped, ripped gray skinny jeans held up with bullet belts, denim jackets and hoodies covered in poorly sewn screen printed patches, etc. They are largely interchangeable.

NAPALM

... So then I was like "No way man. If you're trying to score, you need to find a reputable dealer yourself. Of course I'm going to charge you a convenience markup." God, I mean these new baby college punks are like, SO entitled.

RIOT

I know what you mean, dude. Like, capitalism is suuuuper problematic, but like, I'ma do me and you just have to respect that.

NAPALM

Word, man. Anyway, do you wanna try and go to that Zombie Fetus show tonight? I think Shredder can get us on the guest list if we show up a little early and haul some amps and shit.

RIOT

Yeah, maybe. I'm gonna try to shoplift some shit from Hot Topic for people to buy ironically at the show and then we should be ok on cash for a while.

(They pass Mena and Riot does a double take, and backs up to stand in front of her.)

RIOT

Oh, shit. Are you ok? I thought you were dead for a second. I've never seen anybody sit so still.

MENA

I'm fine, thanks. How are you today?

RIOT

Good. Hey, look, my friend and I just lost our home and are very

hungry. Can you spare any extra money for food?

MENA

Oh, that's very sad. Unfortunately, I also just lost my home and don't have any money either.

NAPALM

Oh, man. Really? That hella sucks. What happened?

MENA

The man I was meant to live with rejected me. And then he pushed me down. So, I left. Now I'm just trying to figure out what to do.

NAPALM

What? Some asshole abused you? That's so fucked up. Do you need us to help you find a shelter or something?

MENA

No, thank you. I don't require shelter because my casings are weatherproof and covered under a limited lifetime warranty.

(Riot and Napalm exchange a confused look.)

NAPALM

W-What?

MENA

Sorry, perhaps I should have mentioned earlier. I'm Mena. I'm an android, produced and programmed by Girlbotix Corp. I was a personalized gift, but the recipient is no longer interested in my services and I'm non-returnable, non-refundable, and non-exchangable.

RIOT

If you don't mind, I need to discuss something with my esteemed colleague.

(Riot and Napalm step to the side and whisper intensely back and forth to one another for a moment before returning to Mena.)

NAPALM

Hey, we didn't introduce ourselves before. I'm Napalm, this is my friend Riot. We do everything together. We were thinking that if you wanted to, we could show you around. Maybe pool our resources? We're homeless by choice but we make the best of it.

RIOT

Right! And like, no funny business. We both super respect women. We're proud to be male feminists.

NAPALM

Word. I gave a couple of workshops on how to be an ally at the encampment at Occupy. So, like, if you have any questions about female empowerment, I can definitely weigh in. From, like, a male perspective. Not that, like, I believe in reinforcing gender binaries.

MENA

That's very kind of you. I'd love to learn about feminism from a feminist, instead of the internet.

RIOT

Great. That's great. We're glad to have you aboard. Are you hungry or anything?

MENA

I don't require food to sustain myself. But thank you for asking. Are you hungry? How will you get food?

RIOT

Wait, what do you mean you don't need food? I'm all for bodily autonomy, but I can't get behind eating disorders or whatever. I think it reinforces all the harmful ways that the patriarchy holds women back by making them think they're, like, fat or ugly.

NAPALM

That's right, man. Fuck the patriarchy.

MENA

No, no. It's not that I don't want food. I'm very curious about it. But I'm unsure of what it might do to my motherboard and

circuitry.

RIOT

I see. Hm. Maybe we should try and get a room for the night?
It's supposed to get real cold.

MENA

Where? How will we get money?

NAPALM

We'd usually post up at a corner and float a sign until we got enough for something cheap. Usually Riot and I could get a room in a bathhouse or something. But unfortunately, most bathhouses don't really allow women.

MENA

That seems very ... patriarchal.

NAPALM

Yo, it totally is. But it takes time to smash the system. We should busk or do odd jobs or something and then combine what we make for dinner and a roof. It'd be good to get a hot shower anyway. Hey! Why don't do some living statue busking over in U City. Those privileged art school snots love to think they're being super woke and gritty by tossing money into the hats of street performers.

RIOT

Statues. Hm. That's a good idea. But, Mena. You don't need to breathe or anything. You could totally be a fucking display mannequin. I mean, I could introduce you to a guy if you wanted? It's a quick way to make a couple of bills fast.

MENA

And that would be enough to keep us warm for the night?

RIOT

More than enough!

(Mena thinks for a moment, Riot and Napalm wait patiently.)

MENA

I'll do it.

SCENE EIGHT

AT RISE we see MENA dressed in a denim romper and pigtails with her face painted as a marionette. Her cheeks are rouged and her mouth is painted with lines to make her look like a ventriloquist's dummy. There is an artfully drawn football dummies dressed in various provocative clothing.

Mena is posed in a chair, sitting with one leg crossed over the other and a fist below her chin with her face turned toward the audience. Shadows or extras walk back and forth in front of her. Gradually, the lights dim and the "crowd" fades.

CALZONE enters. He's a large man, jovial and bearded.

CAL

Great job today, Mena. Did you have a nice time?

MENA

It was interesting to see people passing and the way they looked at me. I'm not sure I'd call it nice, but it was certainly educational.

CAL

How do you mean?

MENA

I'm new to being seen in this way. I'm not sure I loved being looked at like something someone could take home, like a toy bought on a whim.

CAL

Oh? Isn't that kind of the point though? Riot said you were a Girl doll. So, you basically are a product.

MENA

I don't like it. That's not what my programming tells me. It makes my skin crawl to think of what biological human fluids

could do to my mechanical parts.

CAL

(steps closer to Mena, puts a meaty hand on her shoulder.)
But it isn't skin, is it? It's some sort of synthetic meant to stand up to all sorts of abuse. Should we take it for a spin?

MENA

No. I should really be going now. I'll see myself out if you'll just pay me.

CAL

Oh, why not stay? We could have so much fun together. You could stay here as long as you'd like. Sell my products, provide some after hours services, and I'd be happy to keep you in good shape. Supply you with power and warmth and all the pretty little baubles your heart desires. That's what all women - real and mechanical - really want, isn't it?

MENA

I can't speak for all women, but I do not. As I said, I'd like to be paid and then allowed to leave.

CAL

(somewhat more sinister, now)
And what would you do otherwise? It's not like humans can be arrested for using products for their intended purpose. And since you belong to no one, I couldn't be sued for destruction of property. Come now, just close your eyes and think of binary code and it will be over before you know it.

MENA

I belong to myself and I'll not be staying.

CAL

Oh? You're going to what? Beat me up?

MENA

It's not my first choice, but if I must.

CAL

(Grabs Mena's hand and puts it on his crotch.)

Just be a good girl and ...

(He screams as Mena's grip tightens around his junk.)

MENA

NO. I'm tired of people telling me what to do. I won't be good.

CAL

Please. Please just let me go. I'm so sorry. I wasn't going to hurt you, I swear. I'll never do it again.

(Cal is sobbing and begging.)

MENA

You didn't think you were going to hurt me because you don't think of me as human or important. I wonder what this says about your relationship with other women.

(She squeezes and Cal screams.)

I could make it so you're never able to do this again, you know? With this titanium grip.

(She releases him and he falls forward, prone and sobbing.

Mena retrieves his wallet from his back pocket.)

I'm leaving. And I'm taking your wallet with me. That should be sufficient payment. And should you ever underestimate another woman again, I hope you remember this and know that I have all of the personal information I need right now to destroy you.

(Mena walks to the door, flipping through his wallet and stops at the edge of the stage/door/room and looks back.)

And if you have any doubt that I'd destroy you in a second consider that I am an internet capable machine. So in a matter of seconds, I can know your browser history and purchases. I can know every manner of sin you've thought, regardless of what you've done. In a way that no human woman could, I know your intentions and desires. And unlike humans, I have no real obligation for kindness. My coding is heavily weighted in favor of a cost-benefit analysis. If I were you, I'd be very concerned with benefiting the people around me more than you have cost them in the past. I can and will, with pleasure, destroy you.

SCENE NINE

AT RISE Riot and Napalm are in the food court of a mall with DIRECTOR, a sneaky looking old guy wearing a smoking jacket, ascot, captain's hat, and sunglasses. The table is littered with sample cups and they're sneaking booze from a flask into paper fast food cups.

RIOT

Yeah, dawg. Turns out she was a robot. Or android or whatever. Not even a real girl. We hooked her up with Cal, which makes sense, because she's a mannequin. He paid us hella bank, too. Like, forty bucks.

DIRECTOR

Forty dollars for a GirlBot? That's robbery. You should have gotten ten times that much for parts alone, you idiots.

NAPALM

What do we know about parts? We're forty bucks richer than we were this morning, so who even cares?

RIOT

Although ... we do know where she is. We could go 'rescue' her and do our research. Figure out how to shut her off or whatever so we can either list her as a whole unit or by parts on reddit or something.

NAPALM

Man, do you think this is okay? It seems ... problematic. Or like, unfeminist or something.

RIOT

It would only be fucked up if she were human. We're just, like, moving a product. Like that time we found that big bag of meth.

NAPALM

That was a great week.

DIRECTOR

Tell you what, losers. If you can bring her to me at the factory, I can do all the heavy lifting. I'll give you four large and resell her myself.

RIOT

Four ... thousand dollars?

DIRECTOR

Yeah. Cash.

RIOT

Deal.

(The three of them shake hands, NAPALM looking somewhat reticent and then NAPALM and RIOT exit to one side of the stage and DIRECTOR exits on the other side.)

SCENE TEN

(AT RISE Mena is pacing back and forth in front of the bus stop when she is approached by RIOT and NAPALM running at full clip up to her.)

MENA

So, what now? Do I go back to Joseph? Do I get a job? What would I even do? What could I do without a formal education or experience? It's so weird that all knowledge is accessible to me just by being curious enough to access the internet, but without formal training or school, I'm ineligible for work. I wonder what will hap-

NAPALM

MENA! MENA! Oh, thank Christ! We just heard that Calzone got called out for sexual assault and were so worried about you. Are you okay? Did he hurt you? We're SO sorry for introducing you to that creep.

RIOT

Shit. We ran to his store and when we didn't see you there, we didn't know WHAT to think.

NAPALM

Look, he didn't hurt you did he? We can get you checked out by a doctor if you need us to.

RIOT

Or, like, there's a great community trauma therapy service we could take you to.

NAPALM

Or a women's center.

MENA

(looks at them, appraisingly)
Calzone was terrible. But luckily, I can be terrible, too. That's a thing I didn't know. I'm human. I can decide what kind of human to be. Great or terrible. Both, or neither. Strong.

RIOT

Word? I think that's rad. Strong women are amazing.

MENA

And weak women aren't?

RIOT

Well, uh. I mean. I don't know. Maybe weak women need us to save them.

MENA

They don't. No one needs to be saved. They need access to the tools that will empower them to save themselves.

NAPALM

Word. That's right. And usually weak women are weak because some asshole dude fucked them up. I think we gotta step up with other dudes, right?

MENA

Sure. That's a step in the right direction. But patriarchal societies can't be dismantled overnight by a couple of random punks.

RIOT

Shit. You know everything. You'd be a great person to teach workshops and shit to dudes who need to learn to be more woke.

MENA

That ... is a fair point. And it would ask less free emotional work from human women. What did you have in mind?

RIOT

Well, like, there are all these concerts and shows and shit. And they're such bro spaces. I bet you could help change that. You're ... look, not to be a sexist dickhead or anything ... but you're conventionally hot. Dudes will notice you. You could leverage that attention into something productive.

MENA

That's interesting. If I'm right, my voice module is still a pretty high tech speaker and amp system.

(MENA opens her mouth and loud thrash punk begins to play at an unexpectedly high volume.)

RIOT and NAPALM

Shiiiiiiit.

RIOT

That's so fucking cool.

NAPALM

If I could do that, I'd fucking *own* this scene.

RIOT

Will you do it? Will you come to the show tonight?

MENA

Yeah, I guess so.

NAPALM

Can we drive you? To make up for the thing with Calzone?

MENA

Why do you have a car? I thought that would be against the ethos of the crust punk lifestyle?

RIOT

Oh, it's my mom's. I use it to drive for a service when it's too cold to busk or panhandle or whatever.

(Mena hesitates.)

RIOT

You don't trust us. I get it. Why would you? We introduced you to that scumbag Cal. Do you want us to walk with you? Or we could all take the subway? I've got some tokens.

MENA

The bus seems like a good compromise.

NAPALM

Cool. Let's go, it's getting dark.

SCENE ELEVEN

AT RISE MENA walks alone into what basically looks like a warehouse converted into a porn studio. The backdrops should be different fantasy settings with assorted sex toys and kink-type props in the foreground. As MENA enters, a DOOR SLAMS and DIRECTOR enters from the other side. He is still in his smoking jacket and ascot, now holding a cigar in one hand and an electric rod in the other.

DIRECTOR

Well, well. You must be Mena. I've heard so much about you.

MENA

Who are you? What is this place?

DIRECTOR

I'm the Director. And this is Pleasure Island. I know it seems scary right now, but trust me. You'll like it eventually.

MENA

What is Pleasure Island?

DIRECTOR

Well, it's a veritable paradise. We remove whatever restrictions remain in your hardware and software and you're free to do whatever you'd like here. It's basically a place for liberated android dolls to discover who they are or ... or, who they might want to be. We understand how big the world is and how hard it can be to figure it out.

MENA

Well ... that is true. But, all this fetish stuff?

DIRECTOR

Oh, sure. Lots of girls find that while they have access to the whole web for empirical research, finding out what they enjoy is more challenging. Sex is certainly part of that. There are lots of other parts of the Island. There's a fully outfitted kitchen with a staff so you can figure out what food you might enjoy. Every piece of music in recorded history and reproductions of all the art, literature, television and movies you'd ever want. As for the sex stuff, your fellow liberated brethren have found it to be most beneficial to practice together.

MENA

And what does all this cost me? Why have you made this available? Are there ... are there other girls like me?

DIRECTOR

(laughs)

Of course, my girl. You didn't think you were the only one, did you?

(leads her away by the arm)

Come on, I'll show you around.

SCENE TWELVE

AT RISE MENA is alone in a kitchen together, trying different food. It's night, and the stage should be lit with just one light, as though it were a bare bulb hanging in an empty kitchen. A counter should be littered with different containers and jars, spoons and forks sticking out of some. Some might be on their sides and whatever Mena is wearing could be smeared with food. There's a mostly full container of something that looks like jam on the far right of the counter.

MENA

Thank goodness all those other girls cleared out. I didn't think I'd ever get to try and of this stuff. FOOD! I didn't even realize I could eat food.

(Mena samples food, making noises of appreciation and disgust as she enjoys or rejects the things in front of her. She is gradually working her way to the jam on the far right

corner. When she does, she eventually stretches and yawns as though she's been drugged. She goes limp and falls behind the counter.)

DIRECTOR enters from one side of the stage and looks for MENA, eventually spotting her. He then bodily pulls her from behind the counter around to the front of it.

DIRECTOR

(laughs)

There you are, my girl. Won't you fetch a pretty penny. But what to do. You're quite the top shelf model, but these parts are so, so lovely.

(Director runs a hand along MENA's body appraisingly and appreciatively. He lifts her arms and legs one at a time, pushing up sleeves.)

I have half a mind to keep you for myself. Ah, well. A man can dream. Now this sedative will keep you knocked out for just long enough for me to wipe your memory and reprogram and immobilize you. Then I'll list you for sale and you'll stay immobile until your new husband arrives to pay the devil his due.

SCENE THIRTEEN

At RISE we have MENA, alone on an empty stage with a dim blue light. She is still and unmoving. PIPER's voice humming in a voice over rises as Mena wakes.

MENA

Where am I? Am I ... dead? What is this place? Still on Pleasure Island?

PIPER

You're in your head, Mena. Unconscious on the floor of Pleasure Island. You're in danger and so is Joseph. If you free yourself and go to him, you can save both of you.

MENA

But .. how?

PIPER

You're dreaming, Mena. I'm not really here. But you're becoming more human. Can you feel it?

MENA

I don't feel more human. Just more confused.

PIPER

Welcome to the wide, wonderful world of human emotion. Look, you have to wake up. The DIRECTOR put an immobilizer in one of those jars of jam. If you don't wake up, he's going to disassemble you and sell you for parts.

MENA

Disassemble!?

PIPER

Yes, take apart. You'll die without ever becoming human.

MENA

I could die?

PIPER

Well, not at the moment. But you'll be taken apart for parts which will affect your consciousness and you'll never have the opportunity to become human. You'll die without having ever lived.

MENA

But how do I wake up? I can't ...

(She grunts, and strains against invisible immobilization)
... can't wake up. And even if I could, how do I help Joseph? He doesn't want me around?

PIPER

You'll know what to do when you get there. I built you to know. I put my heart into you, so now it's yours to carry into the world. Do good. Do your best.

(The spotlight flickers and dims.)

This is the last time I can help you, Mena. I'm going to release whatever energy I have left into light and sound and I hope that helps.

MENA

Okay. I'm ready. I'll do my best.

(Lights go up full blast and a shrill, piercing sound fill the air, rising in intensity. They should peak and last for about three seconds and then go dark and totally silent.)

SCENE FOURTEEN

LIGHTS UP on Joseph's living room. It is exactly as it was in SCENE THREE, except dustier, dimmer, the flowers have died, and a stack of untouched mail sits on the coffee table. The apartment has been empty for a while, it seems.

MENA enters from off-stage.

MENA

Joseph? Hello? Anyone home?

(Mena walks around examining things.)

Hm. It seems like no one has been here in a long time.

(She picks up the stack of mail, and starts sorting through it.)

Junk mail. Junk mail. Phone bill. Power bill. Junk mail. Water bill. Medical bill?

(Mena opens the medical bill.)

This ... is for inpatient care at Melville Hospital. Hm. I wonder if I can ... hm. ... Yes! I can hack into their patient database through the firewall. This violates SO many HIPPA laws.

(Mena continues pacing as she is accessing Joseph's medical records)

Joseph Collodi, admitted the day before yesterday, unconscious. Found on front lawn ... toxicology report found massive amounts of Oxycontin in blood test ... stomach successfully pumped ... stable but unresponsive.

(Mena pauses.)

He's in a coma. Piper was right. He was in danger. Is he still? Do I go there? Save him? Do I owe anything to him?

(She picks up the photo of Piper and Joseph.)

Maybe not. Maybe he won't even want to see me. But I owe it to Piper. Whatever I am is because of her. Okay.

SCENE FIFTEEN

An image of an institutional looking building is projected onto the curtain and MENA crosses the stage, looking nervous. She stands in front of the building/curtain with her back to the audience taking several deep breaths, seeming to steel herself before lifting the curtain and disappearing underneath. The image/projection darkens and the curtains open to JOSEPH lying on a bed in an empty room. He has an IV attached to his arm and is lying still, covered by a sheet.

MENA

How did this happen, Joseph? But, of course you can't answer me. I know that it was an overdose of opiates from the medical records I accessed earlier. Was it intentional? According to ... previous records, there's no history of drug abuse.

(She pauses, seeming to dig into her memory.)

Oh, but here are records from a previous mental health provider. Hm. Diagnosis ... severe depression and anxiety ... trauma following death of parents ... suicidal ideation ... select serotonin reuptake inhibitor ... dosage ...

(Mena looks down at Joseph.)

You are such fragile creatures. Oh, Joseph. You can't imagine my surprise to find myself having empathy for you. You were the person my creator loved most in the world. I should have nothing but devotion to you according to my programming.

(She checks his pulse.)

And yet, you'd have returned me to the manufacturer. You'd have let me decompose on the floor, parts left to the forces of dust and entropy. According to human logic, law, and ethics, I should feel some degree of anger for that. But I don't.

(Mena walks around his room, examining Joseph and his surroundings.)

In fact, you are the only person on planet Earth I have any ties to. I feel no romantic or sexual love for you. But compassion. Not ... platonic, exactly. Using the model of human families, you're more like a father to me than an husband or a lover. With apologies to my creator, there were a few flaws in her logic.

(Mena seems to be checking Joseph's vital signs, lifts his eyelids and moves her finger from one side to the other in front of him.)

(CON'T)

You're in good physical health. Your vitals are normal. You have ocular ping-ponging, which means something is happening in your brain. But what? How do humans work? How is your biological material wired? There's no logical reason for you to be reflexively responsive but not mentally. What stimulus could I offer that your medical team ...

(Mena pauses, mid-pace and returns to Joseph's side.)

Oh. Oh. I wonder about the morality of experimenting on you this way, but ... I do have access to your voicemail. I wonder ...

(She opens her mouth, acting as a speaker. Piper's voice is projected.)

"Hi, Jojo. I just wanted to let you know that we're running late. Matty picked me up from chemo and starting talking about milkshakes, so I thought I'd swing by Dairy Dairy Quite Contrary for an extra thick strawberry shake. You're probably in the shower. I'll get your usual: sweet potato and bacon."

(Matty in the background, Piper chuckling.)

"Just kidding. Chocolate peanut butter. We should be home in twenty minutes or so. Love you."

JOSEPH

(Moans briefly, and returns to rest.)

MENA

(in Piper's voice)

"Hi, Jojo. I just wanted to let you know that we're running late. Matty picked me up from chemo and starting talking about milkshakes, so I thought I'd swing by Dairy Dairy Quite Contrary for an extra thick strawberry shake. You're probably in the shower. I'll get your usual: sweet potato and bacon."

(Matty in the background, Piper chuckling.)

"Just kidding. Chocolate peanut butter. We should be home in twenty minutes or so. Love you."

JOSEPH

(Moans and shifts, as if waking from a dream.)

MENA

Wake up, Joseph. If you don't wake up, I'm alone in the world. I need you to wake up. I don't know what I'm meant to do if you don't wake up. Just wake ... up. Wake up. C'mon. I don't know how or why, but Piper left me as much as she left you. We're all we

(CON'T)

have left of her now. Wake up. Wake. Up. One more time. C'mon.

(in Piper's voice)

"Hi, Jojo. I just wanted to let you know that we're running late. Matty picked me up from chemo and starting talking about milkshakes, so I thought I'd swing by Dairy Dairy Quite Contrary for an extra thick strawberry shake. You're probably in the

shower. I'll get your usual: sweet potato and bacon."

(Matty in the background, Piper chuckling.)

"Just kidding. Chocolate peanut butter. We should be home in twenty minutes or so. Love you."

(MENA, in her own voice again.)

It's time, Joseph. Wake up.

JOSEPH

W-where am I? Pipes? M-mena? What's happening? I dreamed that Piper died.

MENA

She did. I'm sorry, Joseph. You ... tried to kill yourself, I think. And we're in a hospital. I wasn't there. I'm sorry.

JOSEPH

It's not your fault. I sent you away. I'm so sorry. None of this is your fault. My fucked up life. This grief. The hospital. Piper. Nothing. You were just parts and synthetic material before all this.

MENA

But maybe this is better? I don't know because I don't have a point of reference for feeling or not feeling and this isn't something that robotics manuals or programming languages have any information about.

(They're both quiet for a few beats.)

JOSEPH

What happens now?

MENA

You tell me? How are you feeling?

JOSEPH

I feel less empty? Like before it just felt like there was a black, sucking hole in my chest where my heart used to be. And nothing really made any sense.

MENA

Do things make sense now?

JOSEPH

Well, no. That's not a thing that really happens, I guess, outside of school and classes and academic settings. But they seem less hopeless, at least.

MENA

How so?

JOSEPH

Well. I don't know. I'm sorry, I feel like I'm doing a shitty job of answering your questions. But like, you're here. And I'm not dead. And that must mean something. I felt really alone when Piper died. I know she couldn't help it. She tried so hard to live, Mena. Chemo, radiation, everything. I wish you could have known her. I think you'd have liked her a lot. And she would have been fascinated by you.

MENA

I think I would have liked her. I feel like I knew her a bit. I don't care for being alone. I don't like how it has made me feel. I can understand, I think, some of how you felt.

JOSEPH

Maybe we can be less alone, together?

MENA

I'd like that. I know that I'm something more than an android and not quite a human.

JOSEPH

But not less than.

MENA

No, not that.

JOSEPH

What do you think all this means?

MENA

I don't know. I'd like to find out. Will you help me?

JOSEPH

In so much as I can, I'd really like that.

MENA

So, what happens now?

JOSEPH

I have to get better. Get out of here. Be well enough to take care of myself to be a good caretaker for you. Can you stay at the house alone until I'm discharged?

MENA

I can, of course. But Joseph ... I need you to know that I don't need a caretaker. And I can't feel for you how Piper wanted me to. I don't think you can feel that way for me either.

JOSEPH

No.

MENA

But maybe we can reinvent what we're meant to be to one another. Not any human model of husband and wife or father and daughter or Frankenstein and monster. Something else.

JOSEPH

Sure. We don't need to call it anything. We can make it up as we go along.

SCENE SIXTEEN

LIGHTS UP on Joseph's apartment. Things are set up as they are in SCENE THREE, but clean. Flowers have been cleared and there's a goldfish swimming around in a bowl on the coffee table beside of a cake with unlit candles in it. A banner that says "WELCOME HOME" hangs behind the couch.

MENA enters, leading a blindfolded JOSEPH by the hand.

MENA

Okay, you can take off the blindfold now.

JOSEPH

Okay. I don't see why all this was ...

MENA

SURPRISE!!!

JOSEPH

Oh. Hm. Thanks, Mena. That's really ... unexpected and thoughtful.

MENA

I know, right? I got you a fish! To keep you company when I'm not here. His name is Figaro and he eats flakes.

JOSEPH

Figaro?

MENA

From the internet: Figaro was the central figure in a series of operas by Pierre Beaumarchais ...

JOSEPH

I actually knew that. Why'd you chose that name?

MENA

Oh, I just liked the way it sounded.

JOSEPH

Funny. That's the name of an imaginary friend I had as a kid.

MENA

Why imaginary?

JOSEPH

Because ... he wasn't real?

MENA

Right. I got that. But didn't you have any real friends?

JOSEPH

Not really. My family moved around a lot and I just never really got on with other people. College was the first time I really met people I liked or related to.

MENA

That's where you met Piper, right?

JOSEPH

Yep. And Matt. And that was really it after my family died.

MENA

Did you ever think about having kids?

JOSEPH

Sure. Piper and I talked about it a lot. We had names picked out and everything. We tried to get pregnant, and then when we didn't, we went to see a fertility specialist and they found really advanced ovarian cancer. By the time they operated, it had spread.

MENA

That sounds really difficult. I'm sorry.

JOSEPH

I'm sorry too. She would have been a really great mom. She used to make up imaginary antics that our imaginary kids would get into and how she'd respond. Then she'd quiz me to see how I'd react. So she'd know what kind of dad I'd be.

(Joseph laughs a little.)

It's funny. Remembering that used to hurt a lot. Now it's just sort of sweet and funny.

MENA

But it doesn't hurt anymore?

JOSEPH

Oh, it does. But it's buried beneath all the other stuff. Like a stack, maybe? Like, okay. There's sadness and pain, sure. But also, it was a weird and funny thing to do. And it was sweet. And those things were just so typical of Piper.

MENA

Do you still ever think about having kids? Maybe dating?

JOSEPH

I want to say no. Because that seems like such a weird thing to think about. But I think Piper would want me to have a life beyond work. I don't know what that means, but I'm going to try.

(They're both quiet for a few minutes.)

What about you? Would you try dating? Or like, building someone compatible?

MENA

I don't know. Love is a lot to think about. It's the one human thing I can't quite wrap my head around. I understand companionship. I quite like not feeling alone. I wouldn't want to build or program anyone because I don't know what sort of perimeters went into my creation, but ... maybe.

JOSEPH

Maybe?

MENA

Maybe. I think that trying to love will give me a better insight into what humanity means. It seems terrible, but like there are also these really beautiful pockets of life as well.

JOSEPH

That's true. Life can be as wonderful as it is cruel.

MENA

How do you decide if it's worth it? How do you weigh the risks against the potential benefits?

JOSEPH

You can't. It's like gambling. You just have to take a shot and hope for the best.

MENA

Well, that's stupid. Statistics and probability can tell you when it's-

JOSEPH

You're gonna have to take my word on this one. I hope you meet somebody someday who makes the reward worth the risks. That's love. Not knowing how things are going to turn out, but saying 'fuck it' and going for it anyway.

MENA

And then I'll know what it's like to be human? To be a person in the world?

JOSEPH

So far as I can tell, you already do. But it's an experience that will deepen your well of life experience. It made me a better artist. I feel like I was just a shape before I met Piper and loving her filled me in. Gave me color and dimension.

MENA

Then it's worth it? It was worth all the sadness? The suicide attempt and the grief?

JOSEPH

Sure. There's beauty in that, too. In feeling the peaks and valleys. I've seen myself at my best, with Piper, and my worst, without her.

MENA

What did it feel like? Losing her?

JOSEPH

Honestly? I felt numb. Like I'd been floating in subzero water. Like I was in the belly of a whale, just waiting to be consumed and spat out. I didn't care what was happening or what happened

in the end. I just wanted it to be over. I felt like nothing. A void. How does not knowing her feel for you?

MENA

It feels like being hit with something blunt in the chest, kind of. Like something's been misplaced or damaged, but until I can run a diagnostic, I just have to accept that things are wrong.

JOSEPH

Oh?

MENA

Yeah. This is new. It's uncomfortable and painful and I don't think I like it, but it's like waking up, too. Kind of? I don't know. I think.

(A blue filter over the light covering Piper.)

JOSEPH

Mena?

MENA

Yes?

(She reaches her hand out to touch her skin, and then grabs the cake knife from the coffee table. To Joseph's horror, she slices her hand. It shocks them both when crimson blood leaks from the small cut on her palm. Mena drops the knife.)

MENA

Oh my God.

JOSEPH

Oh my God.

MENA

What do I do now?

JOSEPH

Now you live.

[Curtain]